



March 6, 2020

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Senate Finance Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 787**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities.

Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving nearly 75,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports SB 787- Family Investment Program-Temporary Cash Assistance- Eligibility

SB 787 which eliminates full-family sanctions in the Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) program and establishes 75% of the TCA grant as the child’s portion that cannot be sanctioned, and allows 30% of the remaining adult portion to be sanctioned for TCA work participation sanctions.

Maryland has one of the highest rates of Deep Poverty in the entire country: of individuals who live below the poverty line in Maryland, 48% - almost 1 in 2 – live at 50% of the poverty line or lower, which is \$6,380 for an individual.¹ Regrettably, many of these individuals are the Marylanders receiving public benefits, as our benefit levels fall far short of bringing individuals even close to living near or above the poverty line. Currently, the Temporary Cash Assistance program – when combined with federal SNAP benefits – only equals 61% of the Maryland Minimum Living Level (MLL). Although the TCA benefit does not bring families up to the poverty level, it is still vitally important: families use TCA benefits to purchase housing, food, transportation, and other basic necessities. Without TCA, these low-income households have no cash income.

BHSB supports SB 787 because when a low-income families lose their full benefits due to sanctions, they face immediate hardships such as inability to pay rent, bills, access transportation for school and work, and meet their household basic needs. TCA provides vital resources to families in deep poverty. Studies show that children living in deep poverty are five times more likely to experience abuse and neglect and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which begins a lifelong struggle with negative mental, behavioral, and physical health outcomes.² SB 787 establishes a portion of the TCA grant – 75% - as a child benefit, which belongs to the child(ren) and cannot be sanctioned or reduced. As over 70% of TCA recipients in Maryland are children, this is a critically important shift. This bill strikes an appropriate, humane balance between signaling to the adult participant that they have fallen out of compliance with TCA, while preserving household income so the family doesn’t fall further into deep poverty. Preserving these funds

¹ US Census Data 2019. American Community Survey Data

² <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/fastfact.html>

can help prevent children's exposure to ACEs as it can help reduce parental stress help parents provide for their children.

The CDC estimates lifetime costs associated with ACEs at approximately \$2 trillion nationwide, measures that prevent and address childhood trauma not only work to improve the public health of our state, but also have a high rate of return on investment and decrease healthcare, education, and welfare program costs in the long term. Maryland must continue to enact policies that prevent and mitigate ACEs. Establishing a portion of TCA grant as a child benefit will provide families in deep poverty the ability to continue to support their children. **As such, BHSB urges the Senate Budget and Taxation and Finance Committee to support SB 787**

100 S. Charles Street | Tower II 8th Floor | Baltimore, MD 21201
